

My body goes on autopilot as I slowly stand and ready myself. It seems impossible that no member of the audience can hear my heart practically beating out of my chest, faster with each step towards the stage. Turning back is not an option for me, so I nod my head to the accompanist and the music begins. I take a quick glance towards my teacher as she mouths, "Just breathe." Somehow notes start flying out of me even as my mind remains centered on worries of forgetting words, sections, and choreography. Suddenly something clicks and my mind turns to focus. The image of the audience melts away and I am able to forget my nerves and enjoy singing. Nothing matters anymore except for me and the song. I can feel my heart beat to the sound of the music and am able to proceed with confidence. The familiar feeling of happiness returns as I realize once again why I endure harsh rehearsals and vocal battles. It is because of this passion, happiness, and pride I experience once I have succeeded. Nothing is more satisfying than showcasing what years of hard work have accomplished.

Performing has become a part of my life, my daily routine, yet I still allow myself to succumb to the waves of natural anxiety that wash over me every time I see those blinding lights. But every performance brings a sense of achievement and always simplifies to just me and the music. Some people search their entire lives to find the kind of passion that I have witnessed in others and myself every single day in the mysterious territory that is the Arts wing. This wing, feared by every "non-artsy" student, has become a second home to me as I have spent countless hours weekly in the theater. This safe area has had a greater effect on every musical student than we are now able to distinguish. The positive energy of the arts has provided an outlet of emotions and expression and is evident as we lose all inhibitions to belt our hearts out down the halls, despite the odd looks from peers. The arts have simply become an addiction for me. Since my

first voice lesson at the age of twelve, I have been drawn to every single opportunity to sing and perform and have worked rigorously to progress alongside my peers who were quickly excelling.

I have struggled a lot vocally however. Throughout the years my voice has grown and has become too large for a high school chorus, causing me to tense up and attempt to bury my sound. This evoked an entirely new set of problems for me as I constantly battled my natural voice to try to conform to everyone else. Eventually I had to realize for myself that I could not change my voice to be what others wanted it to be and I have applied this reasoning to every aspect of my life. Determination has become second nature as I strive to perfect my tasks but the arts have also influenced my life in other aspects. I now have that creative passion to channel into every facet of my day. The arts force me to think outside of the box and never settle for not finding an answer. This characteristic has especially filtered over into my academics. I have taken on a different mindset from my peers and have noticed that I think more openly which has both helped and hindered me. I am able to think of varying solutions for a problem but tend to overanalyze things. In conversation a current topic will remind me of a chain of relevant ideas that cause my thinking to stray. As a result my friends believe I have simply switched directions but I need to remember that even though the process makes sense to me, my friends cannot see the multiple steps my mind goes through to come to this new topic.

Although my peers do not understand my way of thinking, it is this pattern of thinking that distinguishes me from others. It is a consequence of music and theater that I am able to see the world from varying perspectives and thus excel in my chosen academics and activities. Performing has become and will remain a permanent element of my life because of its effects on my character and identity.